

# Real paneer, fake news, and what the Mahatma never said

**8am** My sister calls, and we make up after our recent quarrel. In the midst of Operation Sindoor, I had urged her to come to Mumbai until things settled down. 'Delhi could be high up on the target list,' I told her. 'I don't have a bunker, but the building has a large basement. I also have two Godrej cupboards. Don't worry about food. I have stocked two months of rations, and the best part is that I have even bought a large stainless steel paneer maker.'



**Mrs. Funnybones**  
TWINKLE KHANNA

'She interrupted me. To use as a shield?'  
'No, to make homemade paneer for us,' I explained that the fake paneer epidemic is somewhat concerning, and the food minister has already written to our health minister J P Nadda about it. 'Just bring your kids and come quickly.' To eat paneer, she asked.  
'No, to be safe from Pakistani missiles.' My sister refused my offer. She lives within one kilometre of the PM's residence and claimed she felt safer there than bunkering down in the basement with me.  
This really is a case of *ghar ki murgi dal barabar*. However, per-

haps this only applies to chicken and not ghar ka paneer.

**11am** After the recent release of 'Sanam Teri Kasam', I have been listening to the songs on repeat. While browsing Spotify, I realised artist Mawra Hoque had been edited out from the album cover. Further digging reveals that other Pakistani artists like Fawad Khan and Mahira Khan have been similarly erased from their online profiles. Not wanting to be left behind in doing my duty as a good citizen, I propose that we get all of Abida Parveen and Farida Khanum's songs redubbed by our very own Dhinchak Pooja. That will really teach the Pakistanis a lesson.

have a dabba debate at lunch where there are discussions about the perils of parwal and the tragedy of tindi in the tiffin. These last few days it's all been about the infatuation versus the F-16 and Israeli tech compared to Chinese drones because now we are all combat experts and defence strategists.  
I am, of course, in the throes of another heated debate with my mother over the phone. In her house, one litre of milk yields 250 gm of paneer. In mine, we get 180 gm. To her, this isn't a matter of bovine output but maternal failure. Clearly, I am running my household poorly, and the proof lies in my 70-gm paneer shortfall.

**3pm** Social media erupts with stories of Imran Khan's death, and then they claim he is alive. Even Jesus had to wait three days to be resurrected, but Imran bhai has done it in a day and a half. This is not the only instance of fake news in recent times. Some news outlets reported that India had captured Islamabad. Then there was a nuclear leak when we apparently bombed Pakistan's Kharan Hills. Both claims were later refuted.  
I am baffled. I can test paneer

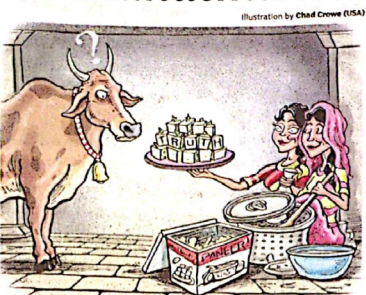
with an iodine solution — but what is the litmus test for the truth?

**5pm** I come across a flurry of tweets and I call the man of the house and start arguing. 'I just read that you are fighting with Vicky Kaushal over who gets to make a movie on Operation Sindoor.' He sighs and says, 'It's fake news. I'm my leg in fire, so I will call you later.'

He really should devise better excuses if he just wants to hang up.

**6.15pm** On the family my uncle posts a warning. A Pakistani-made malware called 'Dance of Hillary' is targeting Indian users via WhatsApp, Facebook and email. It steals banking details and passwords. I ask him for a credible source, and he shares links to posts from the handles of Punjab police. A quick Google search reveals it's a fabricated story yet I managed to deceive the Punjab police. Too tired to debate with my uncle, I reply on the chat with a folded hand emoji.

**7.30pm** The man of the house arrives with a bandage on his calf. Apparently, his leg was truly on fire for a scene. Nowadays, it is so difficult to figure out what is true that I look at every piece of information suspiciously. It was also quite difficult to believe how our foreign secretary Vikram Misri was being trolied after he announced a pause in the near-war.



At the initial briefing of Operation Sindoor, the foreign secretary seated between Wing Commander Yumika Singh and Colonel Sofiya Qureshi made for a powerful image. It made Indians feel united, proud, and reassured. Women, particularly, felt seen and represented in a country where we are often placed in a secondary position. To have a member of the same panel threatened by trolls raging for war was

disheartening. For all the armchair warriors with their flickering screens goading them to frenzied states, often with manufactured and exaggerated news, war turns into yet another video of explosions and noise. At a distance. They forget, or choose to forget, that war is synonymous with loss. Lives lost at the frontline. Fleeing communities. Lost homes. Health and education budgets. Losing out to defence budgets. Herbert Hoover once said, 'Older men declare war. But it is youth that must fight and die.'

It's a relief that our older leaders are wise enough to exercise restraint.

**9pm** After dinner, I check to see the latest news and am immediately hit by a barrage of manufactured reports. 'Bangladesh closes Airspace to India.' 'Pakistan and Chinese troops celebrate victory.'



## Meet the people battling to save this vanishing legacy

Mohua Das & Sneha Bhura | Paris

A hundred years ago, Paris hosted the 1925 Exposition that gave Art Deco its name. The movement would captivate the world. Its language — sunbursts, zigzags, a blend of lavish curves with sharp symmetry, ancient motifs with modern materials — turned architecture into theatre. Unlike past styles that clung to tradition, Deco was restless. It travelled fast and shaped itself easily, absorbing local flavours from Madrid to Mumbai. On its centenary a look at this iconic aesthetic.

### IN MUMBAI, A GLOBAL STYLE GETS A LOCAL AVATAR

Few cities have worn the style quite like Mumbai, with the aesthetic shaping the city's skyline in a way that has lasted well beyond its initial boom. In fact, Mumbai is home to the world's second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings after Miami. But how did this architectural movement take root here and why does it still hold such sway? One big reason: that it stayed true to global design principles while adapting to the city's pulse. In cities like Paris and New York, Art Deco was all about luxury — marble, chrome, and glass — but in Mumbai, the materials used were sturdier like concrete, terrazzo, tiles, while the wide verandas, open balconies and airy spaces were designed to battle heat and humidity.

The post-war years. Tucked inside the unassuming Sumichra building, it brought Deco elegance to women's healthcare in the suburbs. In Matunga, Kerala Bhavanam, built in 1958 by the Bombay Kerala Sahaj, became a gathering point for Malayalis during Onam and other festivals. Dada's Sugat Niwas, with its curved balconies, frieze bands, and quiet red facade, is easy to miss but hard to forget.

In Sion, Vishwa building stands tall with its stupa domes, decorative brackets and clean modern lines — a textbook case of 'Indo-Deco' which, according to UNESCO, is 'Western in form but Indian in spirit'. Dada's gayatri Nilayam looks like a ship docked on land with its marine-inspired fish motifs, porthole windows and ship-like curved balconies. But what makes it radical is that it was among the first to bring toilet into the home with 'self-contained' bathrooms, an upended caste-driven idea of purity and pollution.

ily. But these buildings are relatively young and have been constant use so it's not easy to get heritage protection. That needs to be re-looked at," says Dalvi. Beyond heritage status, there's also the economic pressure to rebuild.

### MAPPING DELHI'S HIDDEN 'EYEBROW' MARVELS

Can buildings have eyebrows and eyelids? In Art Deco architecture, eyebrows are overhangs or chhajjas above windows and balconies that shield the interior from sun and rain. 'Eyelids' are sweeping canopies or projecting roofs that lend entrances a theatrical flair. A 2023 pocket guide map of Delhi's Art Deco buildings illustrates these features through hand-drawn details, mapping 20 examples — from St Stephen's College



PHOTO: DECO IN DELHI ARCHITECTURE

When people themselves understand that they are living in something special, they will protect it. As, in fact, happened with the Oval Maidan where citizens rallied to save the precinct. We need more such localised citizen-based initiatives

### Mustansir Dalvi, TRUSTEE, ART DECO MUMBAI

Mustansir Dalvi, architect and trustee of Art Deco Mumbai Trust (ADMT) that has been documenting and advocating for this legacy since 2016, says, "The design wasn't just for show but practical, to make life easier." Architect Claude Bates, he adds, described them simply as "this new architecture."

That 'new architecture' entered Bombay's shores through multiple doors — cinema halls, community centres, residential buildings on newly reclaimed swamp land. These semi-circular buildings with sweeping curved balconies seemed to float above the street, with distinctive features like sunrises and wave motifs worked into wrought iron grilles and gates, porthole windows and vertical bands of glazed windows that lit up stairwells. "They were in sharp contrast to the dominant British neoclassicism of the time in colonial cities," Dalvi points out.

The tide of time and redevelopment has claimed many of these structures over the years. The latest casualty may be Khar Municipal Market, the city's only known Art Deco public market facing possible demolition. But across neighbourhoods — from Vile Parle to Matunga — some residents, architects and conservationists are pushing back with community-led restoration efforts to save what they can, before it's too late.

Metro Cinema in Dhotiblat, built in 1938 by Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) as part of their expansion into the Indian film market, was restored to its former Art Deco glory in 2016. Eyes Cinema that with its curved lines and red sandstone V-shaped facade reopened last year with its heritage structure restored. For Dalvi, the fight isn't just about nostalgia. "It's about preserving not just buildings but neighbourhoods. These buildings all work together in some way, an urban harmony," he says. "And if you change the profile, height and the shape of any one building, the entire neighborhood loses its essential spirit, which is unfortunately happening in many places now."

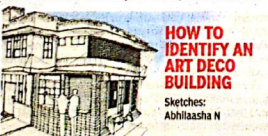
While Marine Drive and the Oval Maidan often steal the spotlight, the style took root in unlikely corners too. Take the Sumati Mandir Home (1945) in Vile Parle founded by Dr Chhaya Hinderkar in

### RETROPOLES: Delhi Cinema (above), one of Delhi's Deco gems, has been made by researchers Getaanjali Sayal and Prashansa Sachdeva

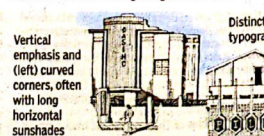
and Dholpur House to Sardarjung Airport and Delhi Cinema tripartite elevation.

### DAM GLAM: The Prakasam Barrage across the Krishna river in Vijayawada, built between 1954 and 1957, features many elements of art deco

Secunderabad railway station was demolished earlier this year. That's why we're urging for more awareness campaigns and incentives for owners," says Murthy. He led Hyderabad's first Art Deco walk on April 29 through Secunderabad's Jeera Colony, with stops at Rashtrapati Bhawan and Mondla Market, home to the twin cities' Art Deco-style clock tower. Murthy has tracked Deco across India. "We've found structures in Punjab, Kerala, Goa, even in



**HOW TO IDENTIFY AN ART DECO BUILDING**  
Sketches: Abhilaasha N



Vertical emphasis and (left) curved corners, often with long horizontal sunshades



Distinctive typography, Tropical and nautical imagery, Zigzag and Chevron patterns

rural and semi-rural stretches. In Kerala and Goa, you see 'Tropical Art Deco' with sloping roofs. In cities like Hyderabad or Patiala, the Deco style is closer to its original geometric form. Each place has absorbed and interpreted it in its own way."

### IN CHENNAI, REVIVAL BEGINS WITH MEMORIES

Chennai, once rich in Art Deco architecture, has lost many of its gems to redevelopment. Among them, the iconic Dasaprakash Hotel in Egmore, known for its porthole windows and wood-paneled interiors. But today a new generation is attempting to rediscover this legacy. Artist Abhilaasha N and architect Anand Arora, Architects S recently held a sketching workshop to mark 100 years of Art Deco. "In the 100th year of Art Deco, this felt like a fitting way to introduce people to the style," says Arora. Using archival photographs, they painstakingly drew the original facade of Casino Theatre, which used to be one of Chennai's finest Deco cinemas but its renovated avatar bears no trace of its Art Deco roots.



**DECO GEM:** Raw Mango's Chennai store is a two-storied art deco house dating back to the 1960s

Prathyaksha Krishna Prasad, founder of Art Deco Madras and The Heritage Art Collective, has given many talks on Chennai's Deco history and is now curating a Deco-specific walk. "If I had limitless resources, I'd have conserved the Dasaprakash Hotel," she says. "But my dream is to create a dedicated Deco museum that captures not just the architecture, but life in 1920s Madras."

### KOLKATA'S METRO-STYLE BARI GET NEW LIFE AS CAFES, BOUTIQUES

Kolkata's Art Deco is more domestic and personal rather than institutional. "What's unique here is how the middle class adapted Art Deco," says Prasad and former JP Jashar Sircar, who has led public walks and tours through South Kolkata.

The Calcutta Improvement Trust's redevelopment schemes in the 1930s set the stage for this architectural flowering. "Around the 1930s, the corporation did a residential Art Deco signature for house plans. People could simply hire a mason and build," says Sircar. And build they did — across Hindustan Park, Southern Avenue, Keyatla, Lake Road and New Alipore. It was often the women of the house who directed the design. "They'd call the mason and say, 'Metro bari chahi.' That meant they wanted geometric lines, a breeze-catching frontage and a circular veranda." These homes have proven surprisingly resilient. "Almost all of them [are] still standing. That's the most interesting part." In fact, they've found new life — as boutique cafes and de-



**CHIC REVIVAL:** Fashion boutique Mono Calcutta is housed in a century-old art deco style building

signer stores and even modern jazz clubs that use the signage style. "It's young people running these cafes in Art Deco homes. Menus are experimental. The vibe is youthful. When I walk in, they look at me like I've walked in from another era," says Sircar. From the 'jahari bari' (ship-shaped houses) of Elgin Road to hundreds of homes documented by Instagram accounts like Calcutta Art Deco and Calcutta Homes, the city's democratic embrace of the style is finally being seen, he could, he says, he would advocate for an official Art Deco district that spans Alipore, New Alipore and Rashbari Avenue.

Writer Amli Chaudhuri also helped bring attention to Kolkata's Art Deco in 2015 with an essay in The Guardian that led to the formation of Calcutta Architectural Legacies (CAL). "I think Calcutta has — along with Bombay — among the greatest number of Art Deco buildings in the world," he says. That year, he joined INTACH in a PIL against the demolition of Roxa Cinema, a historic Art Deco structure, now being restored after a successful campaign. CAL and INTACH are also working to save the Lake Road cluster, a well-known pocket of Art Deco residences in South Kolkata.

"But things move slowly," admits Chaudhuri whose first novel, 'A Strange and Sublime Address', was about a Calcutta house that was "magical in its ordinariness." He says the civic body needs to recognise that Art Deco often defines neighbourhoods, not individual landmarks.